

LINKED CARACAS: HOSPITAL CITY

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Other approach: from inoperativity of architecture

The contemporary conception of public space supposes a paradox: it is simultaneously the space of none and all citizens. In first case, that the public space does not belong to anyone is a consequence of the laws that rules the public areas of cities, which ultimately cause its use only to transit and rest. In the second case, the fact that the public space belongs to everyone has meant, rather than the possibility of multiple activities in it, an anarchic use of it in which chaos prevails over order. Although we do not refer to chaos negatively, what we are interested in highlighting is that it supposes a context in which the implementation of design strategies that allow planning and organizing the use of space in different scenarios is difficult. Perhaps the second point is from which more cities like Caracas, Venezuela suffer.

Like any other Latin American city, the urban image of Caracas had its last significant change in the mid-twentieth century with the construction of a large number of public works during the period of the Welfare State. Part of these works consisted of ambitious housing unit complexes - such as "23 de enero" (originally "2 de diciembre"), "Cerro Grande" or "El Paraíso" - for the growing migrant population from countryside and slums, which were already part of the city since the beginning of the century. These "blocks" were not only residential areas, the spaces around them were designed with large recreation and rest areas for the inhabitants of the complex. But despite the greatness of this challenge, these works were unable to respond to the constant increase in migrant and vegetative population that resided in these sectors (Sato, 2019), and for this reason the spaces between blocks began to be occupied by slums within just a few years of its construction. Works of this magnitude would not be built again, while the sectors with informal housing grew in the hills to the east and west of Caracas. A paradigm change caused another kind of intervention in slums at the end of the 20th century. The modern renovating spirit that promoted "tabula rasa" for intervention of the city was replaced by the recognition of the so-called informal city, and consequently, from the Program of Physical Habilitation of Neighborhoods, state chose to enable and improve the quality of life in slums from the construction of public equipment. A series of small squares, stairways and sports areas were built in the few free spaces within slums themselves, but once again the growth and densification of these neighborhoods far exceeded the capacity of these works, very far in budget, size and quantity of the previous period works. In the XXI century, informal commerce, fences in parks and squares, or collapse of the public transport system still continue to determine the main use of public space in most of the city: the meeting of citizens.

From this context, we want to think critically about this condition of public space in popular neighborhoods in Caracas from the proposal of inoperativity in architecture (Boano, 2017), which assumes that to neutralize the forces of order that condition architecture, it must become inoperative, that is, architecture must deactivate its original communicative and informative condition to open up new uses and possibilities. Architecture has the ambivalence of being able to be an accomplice or emancipator about policies of everyday urbanism. This proactive attitude towards design can also be identified in the work of the Japanese office

Atelier Bow-Wow, which based on the term Behaviorology have developed a series of small but powerful interventions in urban public spaces that work as a link between nature, urban events and built world (De Ferrari & Grass, 2015). Being inoperative does not mean being inactive, it is rather the activity that restores the power of beings -citizens-, things -city- and environment -nature-, making them susceptible to being used in new ways that try to avoid its anarchic use.

The @ccs_vinculada project, winner of the 1st prize of the Competition for Participatory Projects in Public Space organized by CCS City 450, is a critical exercise based on the concept of inoperativity over "other" ways of "activating" public space based on temporary interventions that promote relationships and links between citizens, city and nature of the popular neighborhood Santa Rosa in Caracas, Venezuela. The so-called Hospital City covers the intersection of Andrés Bello Avenue with San Julián Street, where the Children's Orthopedic Hospital is located. The presence of the hospital and popular residential areas conditions traffic on both roads; Andrés Bello Avenue is an important vehicular route that links downtown with the east of the city; San Julián street is used intensively by pedestrians who move from the Colegio de Ingenieros subway station to the surroundings of the hospital. Despite this high pedestrian traffic, San Julián street does not have the appropriate space for pedestrians or universal accessibility. At the same time, its encounter with Andrés Bello Avenue is saturated by the presence of kiosks, public transport stops, and informal commerce, which obstruct pedestrian traffic to the hospital on the sidewalk and across the avenue.



Figure 01. Hospital City sector. Source: CCS Vinculada (2017).

2 DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Links

Due to the scope of the contest intervention, the inoperativity cannot be applied in medium or large-scale urban design proposals that would cause significant changes in infrastructure -removing pavements, widening sidewalks, redistributing service networks, etc.-, rather this makes us to explore the field of conductology as an alternative way to approach the proposal. Esta estratégia consideraria que o design está condicionado pelas relações existentes entre a natureza, os atos humanos e o mundo construído. This strategy assumes that design is conditioned by the relationships between nature, human actions and built world. Taking this as a premise, the proposal will not be defined by its "formal" dimension, but rather by its combinations of spaces, movements, and events that cause new relationships or links, understanding the city as a network of events rather than as a constructed fact (Tschumi, 1994). In other words, architecture could not be dissociated from the events it generates and hosts at the same time.

As can be seen in Figure 02, the main objective of the proposal is then to create new relationships or reformulate obsolete ones. Each group of bubbles represents a link: citizen-city (purple), citizen-nature (green) and citizen-citizen (blue); and the dotted lines represent the connections between the different users benefited from the intervention: transporters, pedestrians, people with reduced mobility, hospital patients, workers and neighbors. In the case of the relationship between citizen and city, improvements are proposed in the relationship between citizens and the urban space in which they live daily, mobilizing and recognizing the urban and landscape values of the city. The objective is that the citizen "live" their city in a more active and conscious way. For link with nature, it seeks to generate instances for generation of conscience about the integration of natural resources such as air, water and/or vegetation in the planning and public administration of cities, thus incorporating knowledge about ecology and sustainable development within urban dynamics. Finally, a relationship is proposed between people of the sector -both visitors, workers and neighbors- through strategies that seek to generate social, economic and cultural links between people to promote values of citizenship like safety, quality of life, solidarity. The intention is to generate a circuit of inhabited and safety areas that generate "conscience".

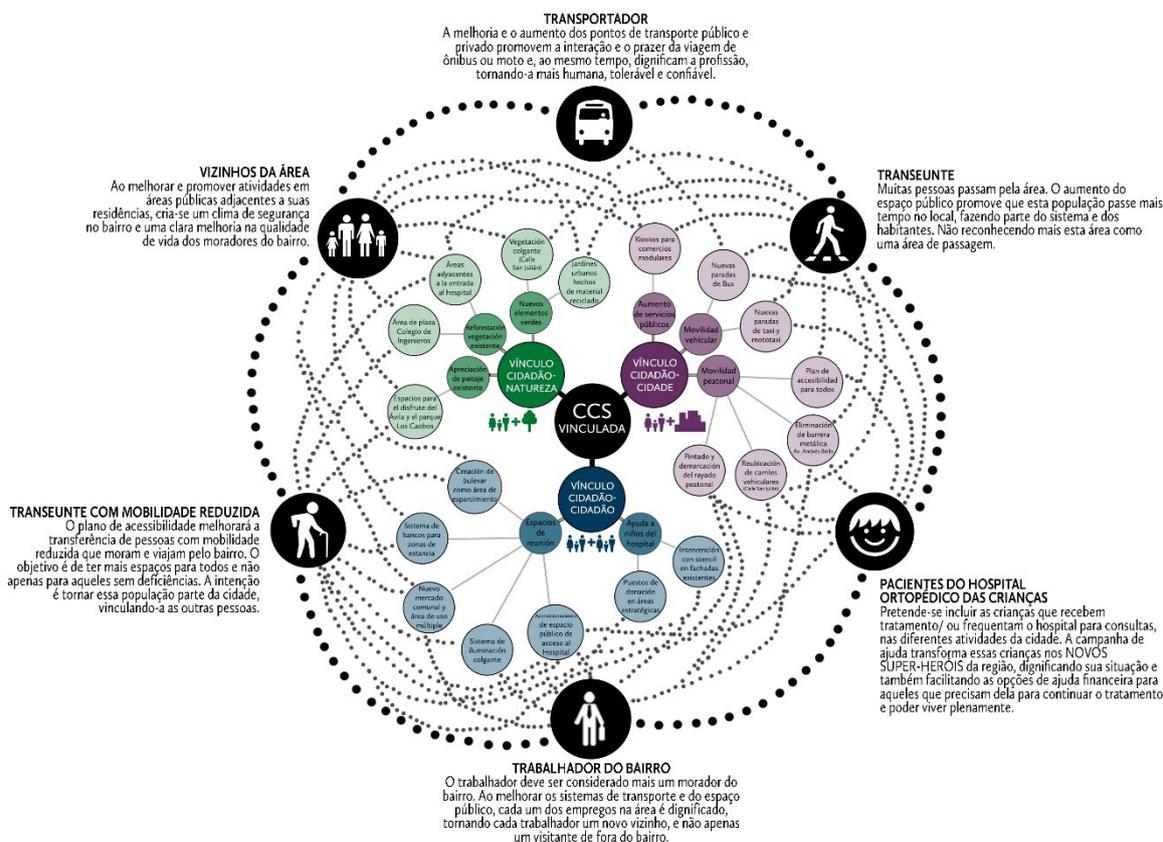


Figure 02. Links diagram. Source: CCS Vinculada (2017).

2.2 Interventions

The proposal has been developed as a master plan, identifying a series of relationships to power within the intervention polygon, and identifying inside it underused, degraded or deteriorated areas that have enough potential -location, free area, proximity to commercial buildings or services, etc. - to create another approach to the use of urban public space. To do this, we put together an interdisciplinary group of participants: architects, visual artists, social activists and even institutions, collectives and community organizations, who with the support of the neighbors were able to “activate” it from collaborative work in 3 defined sectors: court, ramp and boulevard.

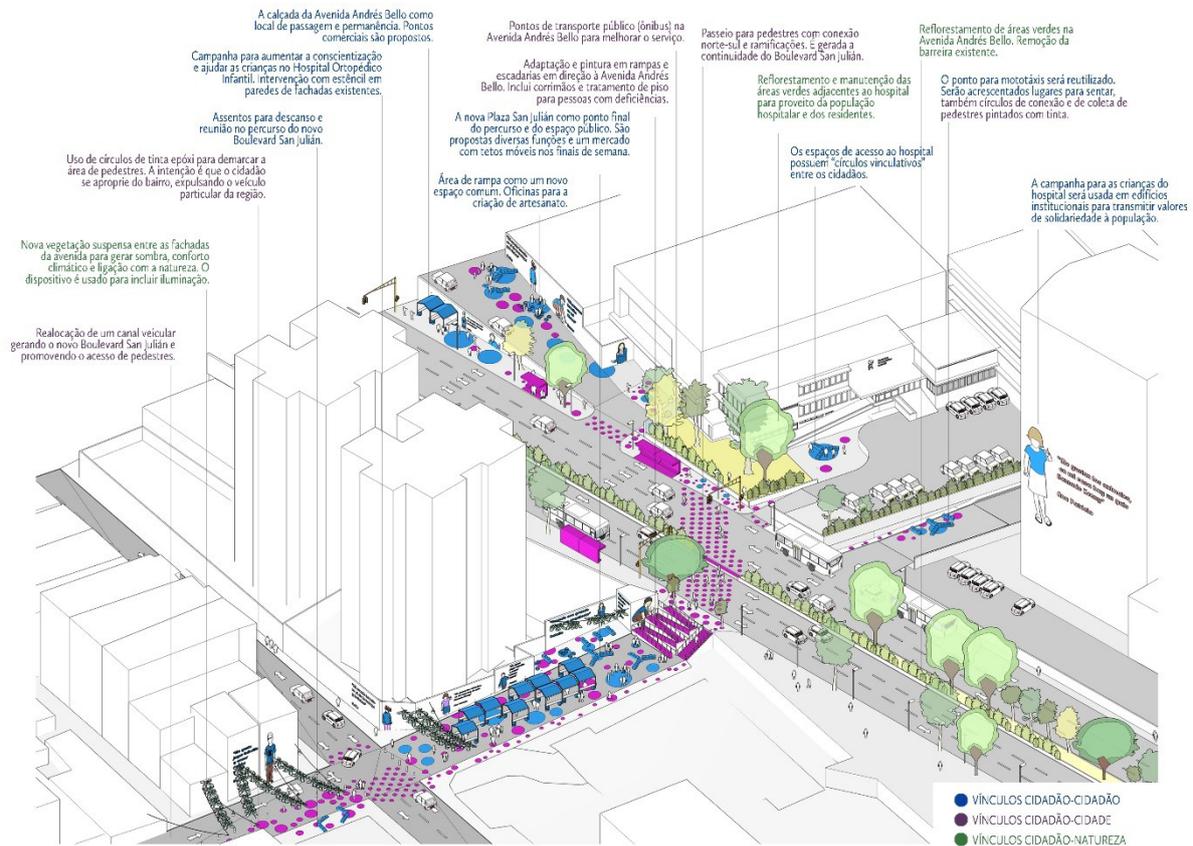


Figure 03: Master Plan. Source: CCS Vinculada (2017).

2.2.1 Court sector

Currently the alley that separates the Children's Orthopedic Hospital from the Luisa Goicoa Communal School is used as a parking lot for the service areas of both institutions, as well as a pedestrian path to the popular neighborhood in the north of Andrés Bello Avenue. It is proposed to activate this sector with interventions on pavement and facades that allow the creation of a "playful" instance in this space. Two interventions were made on the façade of the hospital service areas; The first corresponds to "Voices of Hospital City", a series of stencils with the faces of patients and hospital care staff, which aimed to create conscience in the community about the significant work of the hospital, generating links between what happens inside (today isolated) and what happens outside (without interest in knowing what happens in the hospital). The second intervention is a mural made up of circles and words chosen by the members of the community themselves. The pavement is complemented with "Linking circles", circles of different colors and sizes that, according to their position and grouping, define the use of the land: pedestrian traffic, crosswalk, stay and play area.

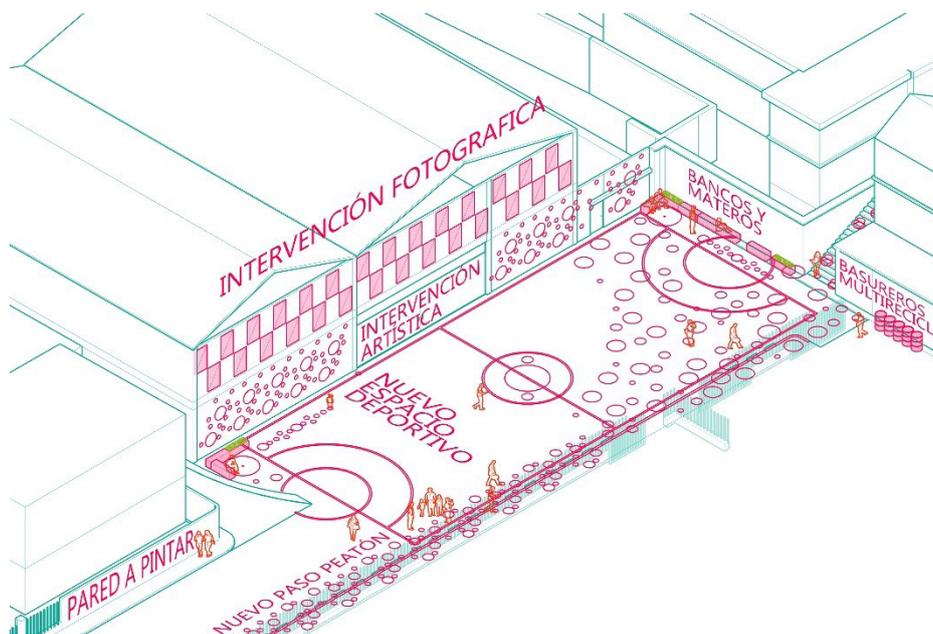


Figure 04: Court sector. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).



Figure 05: Elaboration of intervention. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).



Figure 06: Community activity. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).

2.2.2 Ramp sector

In this sector there is a ramp which is parallel to Andrés Bello Avenue that currently does not have clearly defined the limits of the vehicular pavement. This is the main cause of conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians in this sector. For this reason, “Linking circles” here have been used to indicate the area for the pedestrian crossing at one end of the ramp. Likewise, the parking spaces for the residents of the sector have been drawn on the ground in an orderly way. Right in this place there is also an artistic intervention of kinetic art on the wall of the hospital itself, which can even be seen from Andrés Bello Avenue.

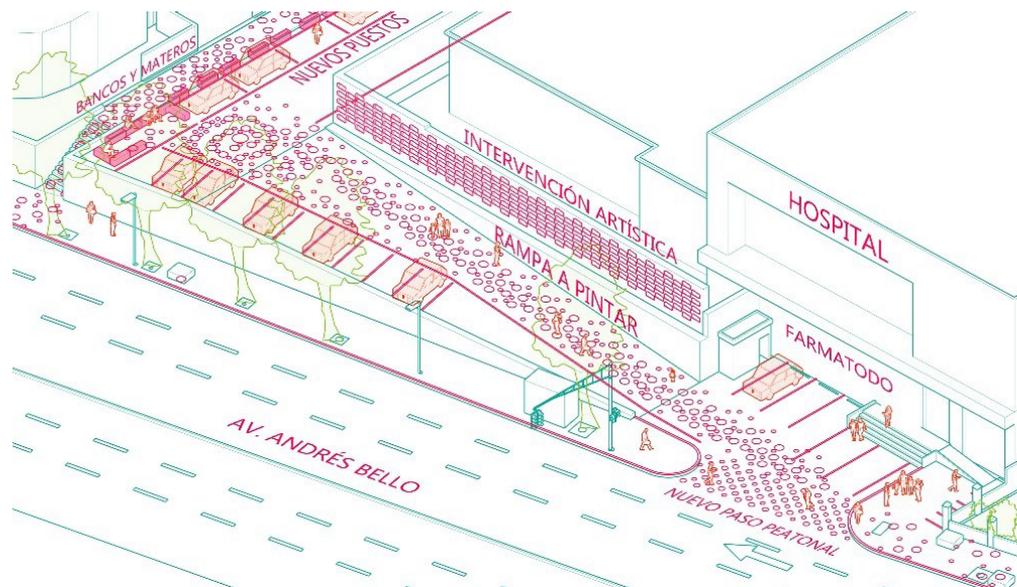


Figure 07: Ramp sector. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).

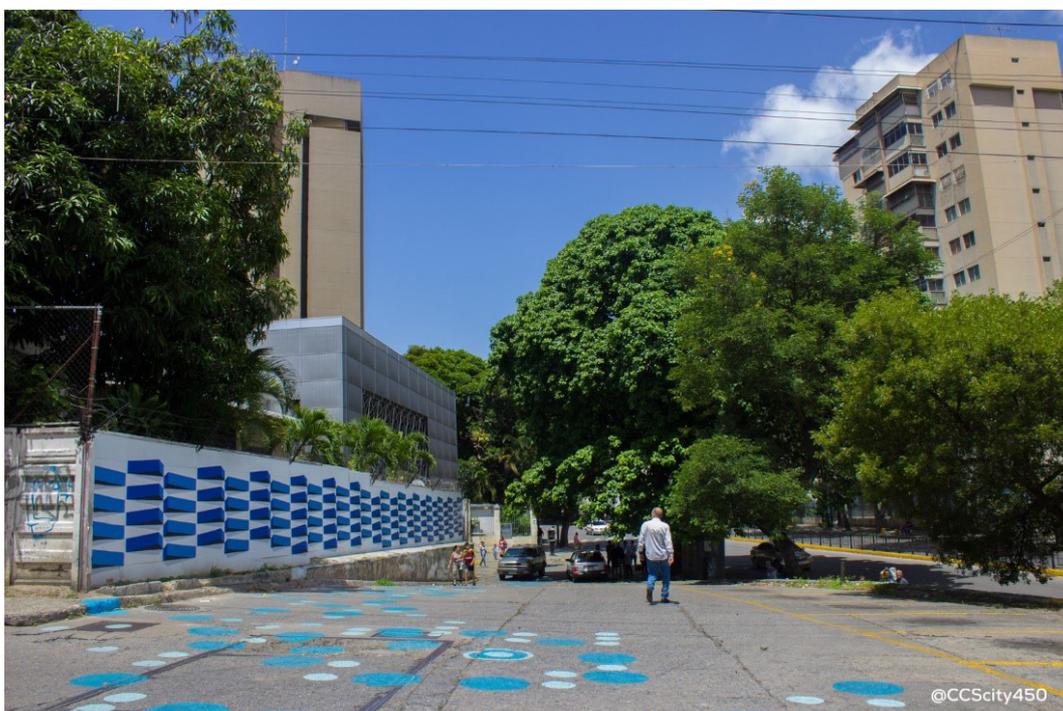


Figure 08: Children's Orthopedic Hospital's mural. Source: Fundación Espacio. Reynaldo Díaz (2018).



Figure 09: Linking circles. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).

2.2.3 Boulevard sector

San Julián Street is on the south side of Andrés Bello Avenue, which despite being for vehicular traffic, is massively used by people to go from the neighborhood to Andrés Bello Avenue in the north and to the Colegio de Ingenieros subway station in the south. Due to the level-difference in the sector, San Julián Street is not connected by vehicular traffic with Andrés Bello Avenue; instead there is a ramp that favors pedestrian use. To consolidate this pedestrian condition, a series of wood platforms have been arranged on the pavement that allow popular merchants to place their merchandise and the community to do different activities: dances, games or open-air cinema. Complementing the intervention, "linking circles" have also been painted to define pedestrian and play areas.

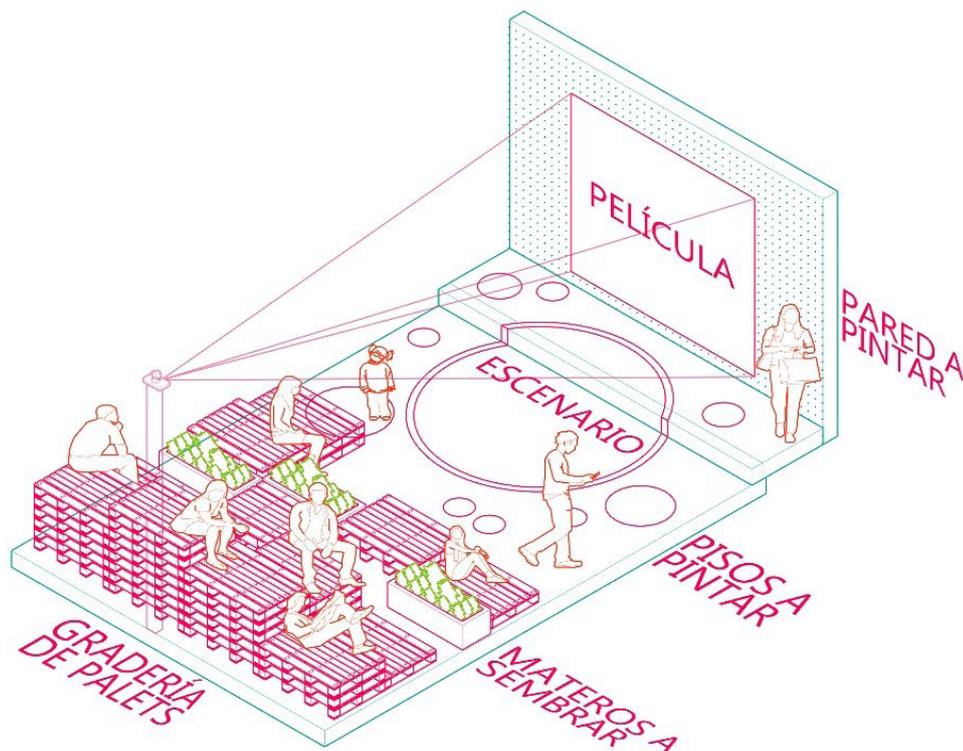


Figure 10: Boulevard sector. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).



Figure 11: San Julián Street's view. Source: Fundación Espacio. Reynaldo Díaz (2018).



Figura 12: Pedestrian ramp's intervention. Source: Fundación Espacio. Reynaldo Díaz (2018).



Figure 13: Platforms and linking circles. Source: CCS Vinculada (2018).

3 CONCLUSIONS

Although the proposal brought together the sector community for several days, we consider that this kind of ephemeral interventions do not have the capacity to concretely solve the problems of infrastructure, equipment or services that the most vulnerable urban sectors of Caracas have suffered for more than 50 years. This inability of the project was assumed from the beginning of the conceptualization and design of the proposal, and therefore it was not part of the objectives of this once built. In fact, the general coordination was carried out by a non-governmental organization, and the budget for the execution of the project - and the other proposals selected in the contest - came from contributions from private institutions and international organizations, which was not enough for the construction of all the elements of the original design. This generated that the design of the executed proposal had to be adapted, working in a more limited area of intervention and with fewer elements on it. However, on a disciplinary way it was an opportunity to test "other" ways of designing and using vacant or underutilized spaces in our cities, based on inoperativity, in which new instances of citizen encounter can be created by links.

Through @ccs_vinculada project, the implementation of inoperativity could be identified in two instances. The first one in the execution of the proposal, since for approximately 3 weeks people observed how the volunteers met daily to paint colored circles on the pavement of Andrés Bello Avenue and pedestrian areas, to hang posters on the facades of the Children's Orthopedic Hospital and to paint murals in the houses of Santa Rosa neighborhood. The second instance corresponded to the two days in which the proposal was open to the public, where even though the proposal was designed for some specific activities, goals were accomplished because people freely appropriate the spaces created. In court sector, a platform was placed on which community's dance groups and singers performed, and "o Disability" group organized a journey of approximately 40 people in wheelchairs through Lanzareto Boulevard. This activity crossed Andrés Bello Avenue and continued towards the ramp sector, a place where there were also sports activities and a one day's communal market using the traces of the linking circles. In this way, inoperativity could be understood not only as a product but as a process itself that despite not being able to be quantified, in the case of @ccs_vinculada it was evidenced how the original condition of the so-called Hospital City was deactivated, at least temporarily, based on "other" uses that revealed the existing but currently hidden links in the community of the Santa Rosa neighborhood.¹

¹ English traslation: Oscar Aceves, Oscar Rodríguez.

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CRÉDITOS

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